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FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0102
INFO CIS COLLECTIVE
NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
RHEFDIA/AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
RHEFDIA/AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
RHEFDIA/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0042
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0042
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 TASHKENT 001463

SIPDIS
DEPT FOR SCA, DRL, G/TIP
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: Tashkent Tidbits December 15, 2008

REF: a) TASHKENT 1149, b) TASHKENT 1397, c) TASHKENT 585

CLASSIFIED BY: BERLINER, NICHOLAS; (B), (D)

OFFICER WHO HIT ACTIVIST BEING INVESTIGATED

[11.](#) (SBU) Recently, a member of the Ezgulik human rights group's Syrdarya province branch observed that his organization has received a response from law enforcement officials regarding complaint letters they had sent over an incident in October when a police officer threatened and hit Ezgulik member Karim Bozorbaev after he provided a tour of local fields where children were picking cotton to poloff and a G/TIP officer (ref A). The member reported receiving a response from the Syrdarya province General Prosecutor's Office, announcing that it had forwarded the complaint letters to the provincial branch of the Ministry of Interior and ordered it to investigate the police officer. He promised to keep us informed of any further developments. Poloff also has been in contact with Bozorbaev, who has not complained of any subsequent harassment by police.

TURGUNOV APPEAL REJECTED

[12.](#) (U) On December 11, the Karakalpakstan Supreme Court rejected the appeal of human rights activist Akzam Turgunov, who received a ten-year sentence on politically-motivated charges of extortion in October (ref B). According to a contact who had spoken to Turgunov's lawyer, the judges dismissed the appeal out of hand and did not explain their decision. Turgunov's appeal began on November 28 and was subject to frequent delays. The next step is for Turgunov and his lawyer to appeal to Uzbekistan's Supreme Court in Tashkent. The same court earlier rejected an appeal for journalist Salidjahon Abdurakhmanov, who received a ten-year sentence on politically motivated drug charges in October (ref B).

[13.](#) (SBU) On December 9, the Embassy received another diplomatic note on the Turgunov and Abdurakhmanov cases from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which largely repeated the accusations made against them at court and denied that the charges against them were political in nature. The diplomatic note was a shorter version of an earlier note the Ministry of Foreign Affairs delivered to the Embassy on November [17](#). The Uzbeks also released a similar press statement at the OSCE on November 24 (ref B).

NAVOI FREE INDUSTRIAL-ECONOMIC ZONE

[14.](#) (SBU) On December 2 President Karimov signed a degree "On the Creation of a Free Industrial Economic Zone (FIEZ) in Navoi Province." Under this decree the FIEZ will exist for 30 years with possible further extensions. All businesses registered in this zone will enjoy simplified customs and currency exchange regimes, and there will be a simplified visa/entry regime for foreigners. All businesses will have a 7-15 year tax holiday that includes income and property taxes as well as taxes for infrastructure, roads, and schools. Payments in hard currency also will be permitted within the FIEZ. This is the first such free economic zone ever created in Uzbekistan.

[15.](#) (SBU) In addition, Korean Air signed an agreement on December 9 by which it will take over administration and operation of the Navoi Airport. Korean Air's mandate extends from setting air fares, schedules, and routes all the way to administering the local road and rail network. This is a major step in Uzbekistan's overall program to establish Navoi as a major international hub.

WORRYING SIGNS ON THE WATER FRONT

[16.](#) (SBU) Recent press clips indicate that Uzbekistan is not firm in its commitment to deliver 150 million cubic meters of gas to Kyrgyzstan in January-March 2009. In a recent press interview, the Kyrgyz energy minister said he expects the volume of the Toktogul reservoir to be only 6 billion cubic meters by next April 1, which is perilously close to Toktogul's 5.5 billion cubic meters "dead level."

[17.](#) (SBU) According to the October agreement concluded between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan was to provide natural gas to Kyrgyzstan this winter in exchange for a reduced Kyrgyz water releases. Under this agreement the volume of the Toktogul reservoir next April was to be 10.75 billion cubic meters. As of December 1, the volume was 9.0 billion cubic meters, and there are reports that Kyrgyzstan has already started releasing water for electrical generation. At this time last year the volume of water in Toktogul was 12.4 billion cubic meters.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: The October agreement did not specify the price the Kyrgyz are to pay for Uzbek gas, and the press reports we are seeing are likely a reflection of hard bargaining going on behind closed doors. We understand that a final bilateral Uzbek-Kyrgyz agreement spelling out financial details is supposed to be concluded by December 15. END COMMENT

COLD WAR CROSSING: THE TAJIK-UZBEK BORDER

¶9. (SBU) Poloff and Econoff traveled to Tajikistan over the weekend of December 6-7. The border crossing between Samarkand and Panjikent was sleepy and quiet. On the Uzbek side the only other travelers appeared to be a Tajik couple. At passport control we were told that the border was closed for Uzbeks in general and open only for those Tajiks returning home. Our questions as to why the border had been closed were met with bored professions of ignorance.

¶10. (SBU) In Panjikent a local tour operator told us that the border had in fact been closed for well more than a month. He subscribed to the theory that a robbery had taken place in Samarkand in October and that the Uzbeks had responded by closing the border.

¶11. (SBU) When we returned to Uzbekistan on Monday morning, we had to search for a passport control officer on the Tajik side before crossing the misty no man's land to Uzbekistan. On the Uzbek side it seemed that no one was yet awake except a lone guard. We had to wait until two bleary eyed women -- obviously unhappy over being aroused -- appeared long enough to process our passports and send us on our way. Outside the border control area the road was empty and silent except for the one car that had come to meet us.

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY EVENTS: GOU SHOWS UP TOO

¶12. (U) The Ambassador hosted two events for Human Rights Day on December 10. First, the Ambassador and DCM hosted an informal conference with seven of the most prominent independent human rights activists in Uzbekistan, which was also attended by representatives from EU Embassies in Uzbekistan, as well as the Political Counselor from the Dutch Embassy in Moscow. Two of the activists who participated in separate International Visitor programs this fall also gave presentations on their experiences in the United States. The event was followed by a reception at the Ambassador's residence for approximately 60 guests, including additional activists, diplomats, and representatives of international organizations and NGOs. Several government officials also attended, including the head of the MFA America's Section, the Deputy Mufti, the deputy head of the human rights Ombudsman's office, and several representatives from quasi-governmental research institutions (the government's two main human rights figures, Ombudsman Sayyora Rashidova and National Human Rights Center Akmal Saidov, are currently in Geneva, Switzerland attending the United Nations Human Rights Council's Third Periodic Review of Uzbekistan). A large portion of the Ambassador's speech, which recognized both positive steps the government had taken in the past year as well as areas where we would like to see further improvement, was covered in an article on the independent Voice of Freedom website.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REVISITS UZBEKISTAN

¶13. (C) On December 11, poloff met with Anna Dolidze, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher who has been newly tasked to cover Uzbekistan alongside former HRW Tashkent Office director Igor Vorontsov (the Uzbek government refused to accredit Vorontsov this past summer, ref C; he is currently working from HRW's office in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan). Dolidze, who attended the Embassy's two Human Rights Day events on December 10, arrived in Uzbekistan on December 8 and will depart on December 21. According to Dolidze, HRW did not inform the Uzbek government about her arrival, and she has not yet had any contact with authorities (the independent Harakat.net website incorrectly reported on December 11 that she had received a "temporary certification" from the Ministry of Justice to work in Uzbekistan). Dolidze did not need an Uzbek visa as she arrived on a Georgian passport (while originally from Georgia, she is married to a U.S. citizen, holds a green card, and currently resides in New York).

¶14. (C) Dolidze observed that HRW has "no current strategy" for deciding what to do with their office in Tashkent (HRW remains a registered organization in Uzbekistan, albeit one without accredited staff). Depending on the government's reaction to her trip, she noted that HRW might consider nominating another individual for the position of HRW director in Tashkent. She plans to return periodically to Uzbekistan every three or four months to research cases and maintain contact with activists. She said that Vorontsov had no plans to visit Uzbekistan, as he was verbally warned not do so by Uzbek authorities this past summer (Vorontsov had earlier reported the same to us). Separately, on December 9, Reuters reported that the French Human Rights Minister Rama Yade and German Deputy Foreign Minister Gernot Erler submitted a letter to Uzbek Foreign Minister Norov requesting that the Uzbek government reconsider its decision to deny accreditation to Vorontsov. However, in recent days, Vorontsov has been quoted in HRW press releases making provocative statements which may very well preclude him from ever receiving accreditation, including stating that "improving the dismal human rights situation in Uzbekistan will take more than a rhetorical commitment or yet another seminar."

¶15. (C) During her current visit to Uzbekistan, Dolidze plans to follow up on a few human rights cases, including that of imprisoned oppositionist Sanjar Umarov and imprisoned dissident poet Yusuf Jumaev, and to travel to some of Uzbekistan's regions, including the Ferghana Valley and Jizzakh and Samarkand provinces. She also noted that HRW planned to release "a major report" on Central Asian labor migration to Russia and was interested in conducting further reporting on the use of child labor during the cotton harvest (poloff provided her the names of contacts whom he felt could give a balanced perspective on both issues).

MEETING WITH NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER OFFICIAL

¶16. (SBU) After a presentation at a local school conducted by a democracy commission grantee (septel), poloff had the opportunity to talk at some length with Iskander Saipov, a press officer of the state-controlled National Human Rights Center. Saipov explained that his Center, like Uzbekistan's Human Rights Ombudsman Officers,

receives human rights-related complaints from ordinary citizens, which they then forward to the appropriate law enforcement bodies for consideration. However, Saipov noted that unlike the Ombudsman's office, the Center lacks regional branches and only has a few officers to hear complaints, which he explained was due to "budgetary shortfalls." He estimated that the Center receives approximately 2,000 such complaints a year, while the Ombudsman's office receives about 6,000 complaints.

¶17. (SBU) Saipov also shared with poloff copies of a glossy publications that the Center produced in the past year on the Convention of the Rights of the Child in cooperation with UNICEF and the latest version of its "Democratization and Human Rights" newsletter, which included an article from the Deputy Head of UNDP in Tashkent on the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Embassy Information Officer also offered to donate U.S. government publications on human rights to the Center's library, and Saipov appeared receptive. We intend to follow up by sending over a sample of the literature to the Center. Saipov also plans to attend poloff's presentation at the Embassy on the 60th Anniversary of the UDHR on December 12.

UZBEKISTAN ADOPTS RIGHTS OF THE CHILD PROTOCOL

¶18. (U) According to state-controlled media, on December 11, President Karimov signed legislation for Uzbekistan to adopt the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. Both government contacts and UNICEF reported earlier this year that Uzbekistan was on track to adopt the protocol. On the same day, President Karimov also signed legislation amending the law on universal compulsory military service so that individuals will only be drafted once a year in February and March, instead of twice a year as previously.
NORLAND

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:c943af27-2654-4e68-b5